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ABSTRACT

Using Japanese with Japanese students of English as a second language is not only unnecessary, but could hinder the learning of English. Students must be motivated to use a language in order to learn it well, and the classroom in which the native language is spoken will not foster English language learning any more than Japanese spoken in daily life will. There are four distinct disadvantages in using Japanese in the classroom: (1) native English-speaking teachers would have to be certified in Japanese, an unnecessary qualification; (2) if the majority of native English-speaking teachers could conduct their classes in Japanese, they would be considered less desirable as teachers; (3) exposure to English would be limited and less effective; and (4) students would be less disciplined in a class held in their native language. While no good method has been developed to avoid the use of Japanese in the English classroom, teachers must continue to increase their students' exposure to English. (MSE)

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NO JAPANESE IS NECESSARY FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN JAPAN

By Isao S. Uemichi

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1. Truism

Let me begin with a truism: it is best to learn English where it is spoken as the mother tongue or, at least, as the official language. In such circumstances, English is taught in English and thus best learnt. Take the example of Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* or John Manjiro, if you prefer a Japanese example. They knew no English, when they began learning it, but soon could come to communicate in it,

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though it is not reported that they were exceptionally talented for language learning. This follows that no Japanese is necessary to teach and learn English. As will be proved later, the use of Japanese will even hinder learning English.

2. Necessity of Motivation

The reason why people will learn a language best in the circumstances where it is spoken is that in such circumstances they are not only exposed to, but also pressed to use, it. That is, if we want to be effective in teaching a language, we must isolate a person in such a way as s/he feels pressed to speak it. That is the motivation, the positive effort, of a person towards speaking the language. Suppose a Japanese isolated all alone in a room with the knowledge that s/he has no other means to be freed from it but speaking English. S/he would surely speak English, however poor his/her English may be. You may call it Survival English. But the problem is how to provide your students with that motivation or pressure in the classroom and how to make them go through as many stages of achievement as possible, as if they were placed in the country where English is spoken. Otherwise they will never get better. Although every teacher knows that well, s/he also knows that it is next to impossible to provide such motivation in Japanese high schools and universities where one class consists generally of no less than forty students. Still worse, traditionally Japanese students are least motivated towards speaking and writing English. Throughout the life they seldom have the need to do

so. It is only when they are leaving Japan to an English-speaking country that they are somewhat motivated by the need, but even then the majority of them will escape it by joining a group conducted by some travel agency. This is the reality in which we find ourselves. Although English may be learnt widely and fervently in Japan, the situation is not always good for teaching and learning English. It will make such circumstances all the worse, if we use Japanese to teach English. We should try our best to improve the present state rather than merely save it from deterioration.

3. Disadvantages of Using Japanese

(i) Additional Qualification for Native Speakers of English

It seems as if it were beneficial to both teachers and students that teachers speak Japanese, when they teach in Japan, even though it may be English that they teach. For, as Wolfgang Goethe says, if to learn a foreign language is to know more about the mother tongue, they may know the differences and the difficulties in learning English from their own experience of studying Japanese. But it has, in fact, no merit to use Japanese in the classroom, when they teach English. It is because, as mentioned above, it will not only relax the necessary tension in the classroom, but, to teach in Japanese, native speakers of English must also study Japanese before they become teachers of English in Japan. If the majority of teachers in Japan who are native speakers of English come to speak Japanese well enough to conduct

their classes in it, the examination system will be set up for them to take and pass to be teachers of English in Japan. Many will pass it, but it has never been proved that the teachers who can speak Japanese are better, even in teaching English. A new condition will be meaninglessly added, then, to the qualification for a teacher of English in Japan.

(ii) Repetition of the Educational Evils by Native Speakers of English

The second demerit is that, if the majority of teachers who are native speakers of English could conduct their classes in Japanese, I wonder if the Japanese will want them so much as now. There will be no difference between teachers who are native speakers of English and Japanese teachers. Native speakers of English as teachers will have little value in themselves. Those native speakers of English only follow Japanese teachers. Worse still, they repeat all the evils Japanese teachers have done to English education in Japan, though the latter have already been aware of, and begun to remove, them one after another.

(iii) No English Learnt by Using Japanese

The third demerit is that, if Japanese is used in the classroom, students will always listen to Japanese, even though it is an English

class, and cannot learn English. They will not be exposed to English, though the greatest exposure, minor as it may be, compared with the motivation, is the best way of learning a language. Think of many translation classes in high schools and universities. Students try to remember Japanese translation for the examinations. Another example of demerit of this kind is students' answer to your question of what they will have for English in the second year of the university. They will reply to you that they have *Eigo San to Shi*. Until it is explicitly explained to them, however, they are not aware that what they are talking about has nothing to do with English. I am not joking. In English they must be told that they have to say they have *English-III and IV* in the second year.

(iv) Room for Criticism

The fourth demerit is that, if the class is conducted in Japanese, students may understand better what is going on in the classroom. This sounds wonderful, but at the same time they feel easier and freer to do whatever they may want to do. The first thing they may do will be to criticise you as a teacher. It is when they realise that they have made little progress. But, if taught in Japanese as by Japanese teachers, I wonder how they can get any better than when taught by Japanese teachers. Their criticism will be severer, if they have greater expectation of you as a teacher, because you are a native speaker of English.

4. How to Meet the Reality

Above is the reality we must face in teaching English in Japan, especailly in the higher education. No proficient method seems to have been introduced to meet the reality. But one thing is certain: the more frequently students are exposed to English, the better it will be, for them, to learn English. Students also know it. That is why they will come to the classes under the charge of native speakers of English with great expectation and patiently listen to them, though they may not make much response. It depends on native speakers of English as teachers how to make their classes successful. In the meantime Japanese teachers must think over how to make our students most exposed to English. It is for this reason that no single word of Japanese should, at least, be spoken in the classroom.